Multiple Modernity?
Late Modernity or Postmodernity?
Sociological and Theological Ambiguities

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1. Definitions

a. Postmodernity

We are living in the era of the challenges posed by secularization[1]. Secularization, marked by rationalism, technocratic modernization, individualism and bureaucracy, is largely responsible for religious and moral indifference, which, in their turn, exacerbate the problems of the liquid modernity. As a state of relativism and postmodern deconstruction, liquid modernity challenges the traditional grand narratives and the authorities of theological and religious systems.

Nowadays, the so-called "self-constructed individual", creates autonomously and uncontrollably his own biography without any sense of social legitimacy or religious and cultural reference. The individual that his thinking has been shaped by the postmodern principles does not accept history as a teleological affair, an authority, a timeless truth, or a traditional and communal legacy of tried and tested past values[2]. This is

1. See in our books: *Κοινωνιολογία τοῦ Χριστιανισμοῦ*, Mygdonia Publications, Thessaloniki 2017, p. 799 et seq. and *Παγκοσμιοποίηση*, Kyriakidis Publications, Thessaloniki 2020.
2. See K. Kotsiopoulos, *Ἡ κοινότητα. Συμβολὴ στὴν κοινωνιολογικὴ διερεύνηση τοῦ Χριστιανισμοῦ*, Vanias Publications, Thessaloniki 2009, p. 147; J. Habermas, *Ὁ φιλοσοφικὸς λόγος τῆς Νεωτερικότητας*, transl. Λ. Anagnostou, Anastasia Karastathi, Alexandria Publications, Athens 1993, pp. 34, 35; Z. Bauman, *Ἡ μετανεωτερικότητα καὶ τὰ δεινά της*, transl. G.-I. Babasakis, Psichogios Publications, Athens 2002, p. XII.

explained because this stream of thought denies the existence of truth and the linear path to progress. It does not believe in grand narratives, nor in the existence of generalized rational rules and structures that allow the subordination of individual people to groups. Postmodernity is a carrier of the individual and the subjective[3].

Life is perceived as chaotic, without stable structures and dominant relations; as a discontinuous reality that erases tradition and the grand narratives as models, principles, and rules. The tendency towards constant and continuous change, as well as instability that leads to homogenization and egalitarianism, is all too pronounced[4]. Indeed, at the theological level, references to the salvific exclusivity of the person of Christ in the Gospel will seem strange: "I am the light of the world" («ἐγώ εἰμι τὸ φῶς, ἡ Ζωή καί ἡ Ἀλήθεια τοῦ κόσμου»), or in building true religious identity according to the hagiographical phrases: "I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you" («ὑπόδειγμα ἔδωκα ὑμῖν»)[5] or "being examples to the flock" («Τύποι γινόμενοι τοῦ ποιμνίου»)[6].

Postmodernity and postmodernism can be seen as attempts to "reassimilate" elements based on different values. They are fragmentarily taking elements from disparate religious traditions in a spirit of syncretic homogenization. This whole effort is "baptized" as tolerance and democratic indulgence. The result, of course, is total void and complete confusion and deconstruction. As the sociological research very aptly points out: "Behind the veneer of leniency and tolerance, there is lurking a new form of racism [...]. This is the famous "multiculturalism" and the abolition of the social, which postmodernists enthusiastically preach and hail[7].

In the last analysis, postmodern philosophers, with their critique of Modernity, insofar as they deny even Science's rationality, they maintain

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3. K. Kotsiopoulos, *Ἡ κοινότητα…, op.cit.*

4. K. Kotsiopoulos, *Ἡ κοινότητα…, op.cit.*, p. 148; P. Osborne, *The politics of Time*, London 1995, p. 157.

5. *John* 13, 15.

6. *1 Petr.* 5, 3.

7. V. Filias, *Κοινωνιολογία τοῦ πολιτισμοῦ*, v. II, Papazisis Publications, Athens 2001, p. 513. As the writer stresses, multiculturalism abolishes society on the pretext of tolerance and leniency, thus leading to a new form of racism (*op.cit.*).

the logic of censorship of dissent, questioning the basic principles of freedom, equality and social justice proclaimed by the Enlightenment[8].

After all, we nowadays observe this attitude in the censorship exercised by "political correctness" against the mouthpieces of established morals and customs. Political correctness, as Postmodernism's genuine child, relativizes the absolute or established and absolutizes the relative or alternative, which minorities serve. In order for this to be achieved, it attempts to reinterpret words and concepts, seeking to marginalize traditional principles, values and moral attitudes.

Thus, the established logic of equality as tolerance, human rights and freedom of speech yields to the postmodern authoritarian logic of political correctness of extreme rightism and the abolition of nature, gender and nation. This progressive policing of language has also attacked the logic of religious and national identities; it exclusively supports the rights of alterities and rejecting those of identities, while its intention is to eliminate the distinction between fact and fiction, realism and utopia, true and false, virtual and real.

In this sense, postmodern political correctness is entitled to support the so-called social or psychological gender and not the biological one, social constructivism (or social construction), gender reassignment even at puberty, not because of medical problems but out of sheer volition, the adoption of children by same-sex couples, African or Islamic culture versus European culture, the absence of state borders or security for the benefit of the movement of illegal immigrants, the spread of false news, et.c.[9].

This new ideology seeks to ensure the general norm of thought and behavior and consequently attempts to stigmatize dissenters. Thus, the defending once's identity will be defiantly labelled as fundamentalism and nationalism, faith in Tradition as medieval totalitarianism, the preservation

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8. Z. Papadimitriou, *Μεταμοντέρνα ἀδιέξοδα*, Paratiritis Publications, Thessaloniki 2002, p. 15.
9. For more details, see P. Bruckner, *Ἕνας σχεδὸν τέλειος ἔνοχος*, transl. A. Pappas, Patakis Publishers, Athens 2022; G. Karabelias (ed.), *Woke. Ἡ καθολικὴ ἀποδόμηση: ἔθνος – φῦλο – φυλή*, Enallaktikes Ekdoseis Publ. House, Athens 2021; M. Bock-Coté, *Ἡ φυλετιστικὴ ἐπανάσταση καὶ ἄλλα ἰδεολογικὰ ζιζάνια*, transl. Str. Ioannidis, Enallaktikes Ekdoseis Publ. House, Athens 2023; Anne de Guigné, *Ὁ woke καπιταλισμός*, transl. Kristi Kouninioti, Livanis Publications, Athens 2023.

of the established institution of the family as an outdated way of life, and the contact between the two sexes can easily be criminalized for fear of sexual harassment. Even the mere verbal acknowledgement of the female sex's beauty is considered sexist behavior that demeans women. A typical example of this is the public apology made by the U.S. President Obama in 2013 for daring to say of Kamala Harris that she was "the most beautiful Attorney General in the country". Whoever pays a compliment is exercising power, because the other person becomes the object of his judgment and in this way is devalued[10].

Again, in the field of cultural production, political correctness will develop the "*#Disrupt Texts*", movement, denouncing classic masterpieces of world literature, such as those written by Homer, Shakespeare, Fitzgerald, as racist and sexist, because they are supposed to denigrate non-European peoples, do not denounce the slave trade and have nothing substantial to offer to the African-American identity. These statements come from Mr. Peralta, Professor –quite unfortunately– of Classics at Princeton[11].

Adding to the above the easy denunciation of alleged "hate speech", by also referring to the "anti-racist law", we could easily understand the prosecutorial nature of the political correctness. It is a neo-puritan or neo-pietist state of mind, but of a post-modernist nature, which adopts the Manichean dichotomies of the chosen and the non-chosen, the good and the bad, the sons of light and the sons of darkness.

The above mentioned, combined with the increase in sensualist and consumerist pleasures, will lead to the attempt to marginalize the institutionalized discourse of religion. In this situation, religious concerns and cares are isolated and devalued, and "the ecstasy of secularism" takes over to fill the religious void. Thus, the religious substitutes of hyper-consumerism, technology, AI, virtual reality, Posthumanism, etc. will be created.

In this case, human capacity is now celebrated, while postmodern uncertainty avoids the search for existential questions and metaphysical anxieties. According to Bauman: "People who are overwhelmed by

10. P. Bruckner, *op.cit.*, p. 96.
11. T. Theodoropoulos, «Ἀπὸ τὴ Ρομιγὶ στὸν Περάλτα», *Καθημερινή/Kathimerini*, 18 Ἰουλίου/July 2021.

postmodern uncertainty do not need preachers to talk to them about human frailty and the inadequacy of human reserves. They need reassurance that they can do it and information on how to do it"[12].

In the post-modern society of risk, the privatization of religion is equivalent to the privatization of the subject, resulting in the dominant motto: "I believe without belonging and I belong without believing". This peculiar individual faith is considered ideal so that society or the established institution of the Church is not seen as a unified and coherent entity[13].

For this reason, religious relativism in the context of the "plurality of values" leads to the existence of many groups operating in the area of irreligion or sects, which are condemned by the European legal order[14].

b. Multiple and Late Modernity

These problematic postmodern situations do not express societies in their entirety, nor do they constitute the general cultural and behavioral rule. In fact, "late modernity" is the one that prevails; it accepts religious and national identities in a spirit of dialogue and reconciliation. Late modernity does not deconstruct reason and the achievements of science, while it considers society to be superior to the individual and the collective to the subject's retirement to the private sphere. It resists relativism and nihilism, and considers that religion belongs to the public sphere, which it can help with its teaching and interventions. A typical case is that of J. Habermas, who, although agnostic, will emphasize Christianity's contribution to the formation of democracy and human rights in Europe. He will not even hesitate to argue for the positive contribution of the Christian faith to the contemporary social problems of ecological destruction and the abuse of political power, etc.[15].

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12. Z. Bauman, Ἡ μετανεωτερικότητα καὶ τὰ δεινά της, op.cit., p. 329.
13. Gr. McLennan, «Τὸ πρόταγμα τοῦ Διαφωτισμοῦ ὑπὸ ἐπανεξέταση», in: Ἡ Νεω-τερικότητα σήμερα. Οἰκονομία, Κοινωνία, Πολιτική, Πολιτισμός, transl. V. Tsakiris and Th. Tsakiris, Savalas Publishers, Athens 2003, p. 479 et seq.
14. More details see in our book: Ἀνεξιθρησκεία. Κοινωνικὴ θεώρηση τῶν Ἀνθρωπίνων Δικαιωμάτων στὸν Εὐρωπαϊκὸ καὶ Νεοελληνικὸ Διαφωτισμό, P. Pournaras Publications, Thessaloniki 2008.
15. J. Habermas – Pope Benedict XVI, Ἡ διαλεκτικὴ τῆς ἐκκοσμίκευσης. Λόγος καὶ

Sociological literature also speaks of "multiple modernity": a development and deepening of late modernity, it accepts and justifies the diversity of religious and national identities. In essence, with multiple modernity, each religious community and tradition keeps the core of its teaching intact, while at the same time modernizing the means and the way of transmitting its message. Thus, all contemporary data of the modern humanistic and technocratic science are utilized, without sacrificing the accuracy of faith. Typical here is the case of Smuel Eisenstadt, the thinker who coined the term *multiple modernity*; in a series of studies, he proved that the diversity of identities resists the homogenizing current of globalization. Therefore, as he points out, there continues to be "a place for religion and for religious movements in the unfolding interpretations of modernity. Moreover, the forms of religion can be as varied as the forms of modernity"[16].

Modernity is therefore in a constant and unending dialectical fermentation and trial; it extends into the future together with different religious and cultural traditions[17].

2. Woke Culture and Theology

The woke culture of "awakening"[18] does not accept the identity event as defined by late modernity. Woke culture is clearly moving in a direction of deconstruction of Christian morals and customs, and of Christian anthropology. As the philosopher Michel Onfray points out, the woke

Θρησκεία, transl. I. Tsirigakis, Hestia Publications, Athens 2010, pp. 22, 28, 33, 37, 38, 39, 43, 79.

16. S. N. Eisenstadt, *Οἱ μεγάλες ἐπαναστάσεις καὶ οἱ πολιτισμοὶ τῆς νεοτερικότητας*, transl. M. Maragoudakis, Kyromanos Publications, Thessaloniki 2011; K. Kotsiopoulos, *Ἀνάλεκτα Κοινωνιολογίας τοῦ Χριστιανισμοῦ*, Kyriakidis Publications, Thessaloniki 2020, p. 16.

17. S. N. Eisenstadt, *ὅ.π.*; K. Kotsiopoulos, *Θρησκεία καὶ πολιτική*, Mygdonia Publications, Thessaloniki 2015.

18. See for example the collective intervention of intellectuals entitled: "Paris Declaration", released in May 2017, which stresses the need to supporting traditional values against the woke culture's deconstructive character. The Greek translation of the "Paris Declaration" has been published in: Karabelias (ed.), *Woke. Ἡ καθολικὴ ἀποδόμηση...*, *op.cit.*, p. 79.

culture is heading from the impoverishment of language to the abolition of history and the denial of nature, with the sad result that freedom, truth and nature become distant memories[19].

For thousands of years man has been living in contact with nature and exercising his body; his whole existence has been constantly relating to the natural environment. According to Christian anthropology as well, man, as a single psycho-physical entity, has been co-operating harmoniously with matter, time, nature, history and society. With mass urbanization, however, contact with the natural environment was gradually lost, so that today, at the peak of this process of estrangement, we are talking about its non-existence through AI and Posthumanism (robotic or bionic man, i.e. the hybrid mixture of man and machine)[20]. It is a substitution and modification of human nature, in the name of the latter's upgrading. A generation of intellectuals and philosophers, mainly of post-Marxist orientation, contributed to this. Jean Paul Sartre was the first to de-naturalize the world in 1943 in his work *Being and Nothingness*. Simone de Beauvoir would do the same for women in her work *The Second Sex* in 1949. According to her, the body is nothing more than a virgin candle on which we imprint whatever we wish; there is no substance that precedes existence. Woman is not born, she becomes, says S. Beauvoir[21]. In the same vein, Michel Foucault will write that there is no reason for a man to accept his nature. It is enough to want to be other, in terms of your nature, in order to become one[22]. In fact, these positions were not heard for the first time in the history of human civilization. The ancient religious sects of Gnosticism have been arguing much the same things centuries ago.

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19. M. Onfray, «Βιώνουμε ἤδη ἕναν νέο ὁλοκληρωτισμό», in: G. Karabelias (ed.), *Woke. Ἡ καθολικὴ ἀποδόμηση…, op.cit.*, p. 37 et seq.

20. For more, see K. Kotsiopoulos, *Παγκοσμιοποίηση…, op.cit.*, p. 167 et seq. For the characteristics of Techno-messianism or Techno-totalitarianism, see Y. Harari, *Homo deus. Μιὰ σύγχρονη ἱστορία τοῦ μέλλοντος*, transl. M. Laliotis, Alexandria Publications 2017, pp. 284, 285.

21. M. Onfray, op.cit., p. 39.

22. Op.cit. See M. Foucault, *Ἱστορία τῆς Σεξουαλικότητας*, τ. I-III, transl. T. Betzelos, Plethron Publications, Athens 2011-2013, where, among other things, Foucault defines the liberation of sexuality as resistance to Biopower and moralism's suppressive nature.

The heresy of Gnosticism considered nature and the world as a negative reality; for this reason, it advocated asexuality, the non-existence of gender, as man's supreme spiritual destination[23]. Besides, according to them, the creation of the spiritual man, who was hermaphrodite (*ἀρρενόθηλυς*), preceded the creation of the physical man, who, after entering the material body, broke the original hermaphrodite unity, dividing into two sexes/genders. As the Apocryphal Gnostic Gospel of Philip says: "If the female had not separated from the male, she would not have died later with the male", («Ἂν τὸ θηλυκὸ δὲν εἶχε χωριστεῖ ἀπὸ τὸ ἀρσενικό, δὲν θὰ εἶχε πεθάνει ἀργότερα μὲ τὸ ἀρσενικό»)[24].

The Naassenes, a Gnostic sect, even argued that salvation is identified with the unisex («ὅ ἐστιν ἀρσενόθηλυς») and thus in the other Apocryphal Gospel of Thomas it is emphasized that Christ taught that the male must not be male and that the female must not be female. Therefore, Mary Magdalene must become a man in order to enter the Kingdom of Heaven[25].

Besides, according to the same heresy, the archetypal spiritual man is a reflection of the hermaphrodite God. For this reason, as St. Epiphanius of Cyprus stresses, God is called "Mother and Father of all" («Μητέρα καὶ Πατέρα ὅλων»)[26]. According to St. Gregory the Theologian: «ἡμεῖς δὲ φύσιν ἐπιζητοῦμεν, ἦ τὸ εἶναι καθ' ἑαυτό»[27]. The reason for this is because there is no such thing as a faceless substance and an insubstantial person.

This self-evident principle saves man and ultimately preserves freedom and democracy; it prevents dangerous post-humanist experiments in genetic engineering that would give the State and every earthly messiah the right, in the name of fluidity and relativity, to nullify the uniqueness

23. P. Christou, «Ἐνοφυλία τὸ ἰδεῶδες τῶν Γνωστικῶν», *Κληρονομία/Kleronomia* 5, 1 (1973), pp. 1-16.

24. *The Gospel of Philip. Codex II*, transl. W. W. Isenberg, The Nag Hammadi Library, Harper Collins, San Francisco 1990, p. 51 et seq.

25. For more details see Io. Karavidopoulos, *Ἀπόκρυφα Χριστιανικὰ κείμενα*, v. I: *Ἀπόκρυφα Εὐαγγέλια*, P. Pournaras Publications, Thessaloniki 2011, pp. 325-326.

26. Epiphanius of Cyprus, *Πανάριον*, PG 41, 681.

27. Gregory the Theologian, λόγος Λ΄, *Δ΄ Θεολογικὸς Λόγος περὶ Υἱοῦ*, 18, PG 36, 128.

of the human person[28]. And all this for an earthly paradise to be achieved that will abolish heavenly death or even death itself; the institutionalized utopia that tragically leads to totalitarianism. Nevertheless, the voice of patristic wisdom is always relevant: «Οὐκ ἄνθρωπον ἀποθεωθέντα θέλομεν, ἀλλὰ Θεὸν ἐνανθρωπήσαντα»[29].

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28. See M. Sandel, Ἐνάντια στὴν τελειότητα. Ἡ ἠθικὴ ἐποχὴ τῆς γενετικῆς μηχανικῆς, transl. D. Ginosatis, Alexandria Publications, Athens 2011.
29. John Damascene, Ἔκδοσις ἀκριβὴς τῆς ὀρθοδόξου πίστεως, PG 94, 988.